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ARTICULATION AND LEVELS OF CONTENT IN THE TEACHING OF MODERN SPOKEN CHINESE.

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THE PROBLEM OF ARTICULATION OF A STUDENT TRANSFERRED FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION TO THE EXISTING SEQUENCE OF INSTRUCTION IN TERMS OF HIS PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE CONFRONTS ALL INSTITUTIONS ENGAGED IN THE TEACHING OF CHINESE. THIS IS THE RESULT OF THE DISINCLINATION OF THE PROFESSION TO AGREE ON WHAT CONSTITUTES THE ELEMENTS OF THE SUBJECT. THE PROBLEM IS EPITOMIZED IN THE PREVALENCE OF AT LEAST FOUR COMMONLY USED SYSTEMS OF PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION, AND THE LACK OF EXPLICIT AGREEMENT AS TO THE BASIC LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE LANGUAGE AND THE SEQUENCE IN WHICH THEY SHOULD BE LEARNED. TWO LEVELS, A AND B, OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION WITH CERTAIN REPERTORIES OF LEVEL-DEFINING FEATURES ARE PROPOSED AROUND WHICH SUCH AGREEMENT CAN BE ORGANIZED. A SURVEY IS MADE OF WHAT FEATURES OF PHONOLOGY, MORPHOLOGY, SYNTAX, LEXICON, WRITING SYSTEM, AND SYSTEMS OF TRANSCRIPTION ARE DESIRABLE TO BE LEARNED ON THE TWO LEVELS SUGGESTED, COMBINED WITH PUBLICATIONS WHICH SEEM TO DETAIL THESE FEATURES. A TABLE IS INCLUDED WHICH RECAPITULATES THE INFORMATION SKETCHED CONCERNING THE REPERTORIES OF FEATURES ASSOCIATED WITH LEVEL A AND B. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN THE "JOURNAL OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION," VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1, FEBRUARY 1967. (IT)

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# ARTICULATION AND LEVELS OF CONTENT IN THE TEACHING OF MODERN SPOKEN CHINESE*

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There are currently in our country 107 colleges and universities in 36 states and the District of Columbia together with 134 secondary and elementary schools in 23 states which offer courses of instruction in Modern Spoken Chinese.[1] With increasing frequency, students of Chinese now begin their study of the language at one institution and continue it at another. Most commonly, students begin at the high school level and continue as undergraduates or begin in college and continue as graduate students. If they participate in summer Chinese language programs, they can easily end up having studied Chinese at three, or possibly four or five, different institutions in the space of three or four years, and such students are fast becoming the rule rather than the exception.

When such a student of Chinese transfers from one institution to another, he is accommodated to the existing sequence of instruction in terms of his previous experience. Such accommodation is conventionally called "articulation." As frequently happens, the student's previous experience and the expectations of his new environment do not match, and he is obliged either to repeat one or more academic years of the subject or to devote an over-large portion of his available study time to mastery of unfamiliar materials and to making up what are termed his "deficiencies." The resulting dislocation and waste of man-hours, not to mention personal disappointment, constitute the "problem of articulation." It is a problem which confronts all institutions engaged in the teaching of Chinese, whether they contribute students or receive them, and it is a problem which will become more acute as Chinese studies continue to proliferate.

Unfortunately for those whose previous work in the language, sometimes amounting to three years, has been nullified by the problem of articulation, the problem is one which need never have arisen in the first place, since it is largely the result of the disinclination of the profession to reach even tentative agreement as to what constitutes the elements of the subject. The problem is epitomized in the prevalence of at least four commonly used systems of phonetic transcription, while on a more basic level the student and the teacher are confronted with the bleak fact that there is neither explicit agreement as to what the basic linguistic features of the language are nor a common conception of the sequence in which these features should be learned. Accordingly, it is the aim of this brief paper to suggest that such agreement on fundamentals is both necessary and possible, to propose two levels of language instruction around which such agreement can be organized, to indicate certain repertoires of features which can be used to define

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these levels concretely, and to conclude by urging that such agreement would materially strengthen all existing Chinese language programs.

That agreement is necessary is implied by the nature of the problem. Thousands of man-hours and valuable language teaching resources are being wasted yearly precisely because there is no such general agreement on features and sequences. That agreement is possible, on the other hand, can be inferred from the fact that by and large all members of the Association are agreed on a general approach to the study of language and to the teaching of language. With few exceptions we would all subscribe to the necessity of a preliminary analysis of the target language which determines its key features in terms of significant contrasts with the learner's native language and on the utility of the audio-lingual approach, with its four-fold sequence of understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. Such an approach incorporates the insights of descriptive linguistics and tends to emphasize over-all patterning. It is an approach which stresses "procedural" over "substantive" aspects of language and which revolves around presentation of certain "core" features. As Charles F. Hockett has observed: "The essential grammatical tenor of language, and the key differences between the grammatical systems of different languages, lie in what we shall call the grammatical core.... The grammatical core can be described using not more than a few hundred contentives--just enough to serve as examples of how all the others work too."[2] What is said here of grammar obviously applies as well to other levels of linguistic analysis. A sequence of language instruction accordingly defines itself which presents these core features systematically and which is terminated when such presentation has been effected. Beyond this first sequence looms a second in which a complete accounting is made of those structural features of the language which are outlined on the first and which in turn terminates when this accounting has been achieved. Obviously, the core features exhibited on both levels are to be features of phonology, morphology, and syntax. The role of lexicon is simply to exemplify these features, while the functions of the native writing system and of systems of transcription are even more ancillary. The two sequences just described can be characterized as "elementary" and "intermediate" or as "beginning" and "advanced," but to avoid confusion with existing academic designations it will be preferable here to refer to them simply as "Level A" and "Level B."

It now remains to be stated what comprises the content of the two levels which we have tentatively summoned into being. A definitive answer awaits studies specifically directed to this problem and a general consensus among scholars on the answers proposed. In the meantime, a first step toward a provisional formulation can be made on the basis of existing monographic and other materials containing what appear to be adequate minimal repertoires of the features in which we are interested. Our treatment here will be in the nature of a survey of what features are desirable to be learned on the two levels suggested, combined with notice of publications which seem to detail these features. We exclude from our consideration language textbooks, as exhibiting a partiality of approach which we seek to avoid.

We shall consider first the content of Level A, the level of "types." Phonologically, we expect a comprehensive statement of the sound system of Peking Mandarin

with particular reference to significant contrasts with that of American English. No wholly adequate descriptive and contrastive study has appeared to date,[3] but a handy enough survey of the problems involved has been included in the preface of the recently published Dictionary of Spoken Chinese (for bibliographic details of this and other works cited, see Table A, below). Here we find briefly discussed the topics "symbols used," "consonants at the beginning of a syllable," "semi-vowels in the middle of a syllable," "consonants at the end of a syllable," "vowels," "tones and stress," and "changes of sound," and in addition considerable attempt is made to relate this information to the phonology of American English. So far as morphology is concerned, we are denied even the modest comfort afforded by the Dictionary of Spoken Chinese,[4] and may here simply note the three cardinal processes of reduplication, affixation, and compounding, which should be thoroughly exemplified on Level A.

Turning to syntax, a presentation of the "core grammar" alluded to by Hockett is required, by which is meant for any language its part-of-speech system, its grammatical categories, its functions, and its construction-types and constructions.[5] These features of the language are compendiously summed up in Kuo-p'ing Chou's article, "The Structure of Spoken Chinese," in which Prof. Chou first defines three form classes--substantives, verbs, and attributes--by means of mutually contrastive frames, proceeds to denote subclasses in, and substitutes for, these form classes, generates four classes of function-words on the basis of distribution with the three form classes previously described and with the sentence as a whole, and concludes by postulating a distributional sequence of form classes and function-words into which most normal Chinese sentences fit.

Lexicon, as we noted earlier, is to be confined to "a few hundred contentives," but it is not amiss if these contentives, in addition to exhibiting the core features of the language, are useful as well. One test of utility is frequency, and about the only reliable word frequency studies of use on Level A are the materials compiled by Shibagaki Yoshitarō. As a first essay Shibagaki's list is perhaps not to be too heavily relied upon, but his words are useful, are limited to a reasonably small number (1500), and do exemplify all of the form classes and function-words described by Prof. Chou. Acceptance of the list can stand until more comprehensive studies are available. Characters present more complicated problems. Many frequency counts have been made for them,[6] but these do not necessarily square with the findings of word frequency studies. On Level A characters introduced should relate to the chosen lexicon and no other, and initial emphasis should be laid on presentation of the structure of the writing system in terms of hierarchical arrangements of recurrent partials.[7] Over the long haul, however, i.e., for both Level A and Level B, character frequency should be taken into account. For example, the 2000 character list edited by Tsujimoto Haruhiko in 1958, one based on the Changyongzi biao promulgated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in June 1952, accounts, it has been estimated, for some ninety five per cent of all characters occurring in standard paihua texts. Inclusion of sufficient lexical items to exemplify this list of 2000 characters would seem indicated on Level B.

The final feature to be noted on Level A is that of systems of transcription. Beginning students are generally introduced to Chinese through the medium of the

Yale, Wade-Giles, G. R., or Pinyin systems, and it is perhaps sufficient that these students be acquainted with the phonetic realities underlying their particular convention. Ready access to such information in terms of realization in the International Phonetic Alphabet of initials, finals, and whole syllables can be found in the introduction to Hugh M. Stimson's The Jongyuan in yunn, where Stimson's own system of transcription is also described at length.

Having exhausted our repertoires of Level A features, we now turn to Level B, the level of "tokens." Here, the relative importance of phonology, morphology, and syntax over lexicon, the writing system, and systems of transcription remains what it was on Level A. On Level B we expect as full an accounting as possible for the first three of these features and for the sixth. The lexicon and the writing system, on the other hand, are "open-ended" and do not admit of a complete enumeration. Here, however, knowledge of word and character frequency can at least indicate those sets of words and characters which should appropriately succeed those introduced on Level A. Accordingly, a sketch, however rough, of the contents of Level B is possible.

For phonology, morphology, and syntax complete accounting for our purposes is contained in Yuen Ren Chao's A Grammar of Spoken Chinese. We need note here only those main features of his treatment, cited in his own terminology, which amplify or contrast with the corresponding contents of Level A. For phonology these would include "syllabic structure," "initials and consonants," "finals and vowels," "tones," "syllabic types," "stress," "intonation," "morphophonemics," and "marginal phonemes." Chao's discussion of morphology is particularly rich. His treatment includes detailed discussions of "free and bound forms," "prosodic aspects," "substitution and separation," "words in functional frames," "the word as a unit of meaning," "word identity and morpheme identity," "definitions and tests for the syntactic word," "reduplication," "affixation," and "nature and classification of compounds." For syntax, in contrast to Kuo-p'ing Chou's brief structural sketch, Chao writes fully four chapters on the structure of sentences and on word classes, of which the main features touched upon are "minor sentences," "structure of the full sentence," "grammatical meaning of subject and predicate," "subject and predicate as question and answer," "the full sentence as made up of minor sentences," "types of subjects," "types of predicates," "S-P predicates," "compound sentences," "complex sentences," "pivotal sentences," "planned and unplanned sentences," "expressions and constructions," "coordination," "subordination," "V-O constructions," "verbal expressions in series," "V-R constructions," "nouns," "proper names," "place words," "time words," "determinative-measure compounds," "noun-localizer compounds," "determinatives," "measures," "localizers," "pronouns," "other substitutes," "verbs," "prepositions," "adverbs," "conjunctions," "particles," and "interjections."

For lexicon the Putonghua sangian changyonqci biao provides the only large sample of high frequency words available for control of Level B vocabulary. This list, like the less extensive Shibagaki list, is a first effort and will doubtless see revision as further frequency studies are made. In the meantime, both as a list based on counting and as one of the right length (3000 words), it can be accepted on a provisional basis. The same is true of the Tsujimoto list of 2000 characters,

which we have already discussed. So far as systems of transcription are concerned, the student at Level B in addition to his original convention should be familiar with several other commonly used systems. In the "Kakushu ompyō-monji oyobi Chūgokugo onsei tenshahō no taishōhyō" compiled by Tsujimoto and Hashimoto one finds eight such systems described (Pinyin, National Phonetic Alphabet, Latinxua, Wade-Giles, and G. R., together with the French, German, and Russian conventions), all compared with I. P. A. for initials, finals, and the syllable as a whole. This information, taken together with that contained in The Jongyuan in yunn, is likely to provide the Level B student with all he need ever know about systems of transcription.

The table which follows recapitulates the information sketched in above concerning the repertoires of features associated with Level A and Level B.

Table A: Repertoires of Features.

| Feature | Level A | Level B |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Phonology. | Dictionary of Spoken Chinese (New Haven, 1966), pp. x-xviii: "Sounds." | Yuen Ren Chao: A Grammar of Spoken Chinese (Berkeley, 1965), pp. 24-71: "Phonology." |
| 2. Morphology. | [1) reduplication; 2) affixation; 3) compounding] | A Grammar of Spoken Chinese, pp. 181-256: "Word and Morpheme"; pp. 257-343: "Morphological Types"; pp. 483-666: "Compounds." |
| 3. Syntax. | Kuo-p'ing Chou: "The Structure of Spoken Chinese," in Albert H. Marckwardt (ed.): Studies in Languages and Linguistics in Honor of Charles C. Fries (Ann Arbor, 1964), pp. 81-90. | A Grammar of Spoken Chinese, pp. 73-180: "The Sentence"; pp. 345-482: "Syntactical Types"; pp. 667-892: "Parts of Speech: Substantives"; pp. 893-1101: "Verbs and Other Parts of Speech." |
| 4. Lexicon. | Shibagaki Yoshitarō: Chūgokugo kihon goi (Tokyo, 1956); Shibagaki Yoshitarō et al.: "Chūgokujōyō goi," in Kuraishi Takeshirō (ed.): Chūgokugo-gaku jiten (Tokyo, 1958), pp. 817-853; R. Maeth (ed.): A Basic 1500 Word Glossary of Modern Chinese (CU, Dept. of Chinese and Japanese: New York, 1964). | Putonghua sanqian changyongci biao (Peking, 1959). |

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|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Writing System. | Tsujimoto Haruhiko: "Chūgoku jōyōji-hyō: ittō jōyōji /1050/," in Chūgokugo-gaku jiten, pp. 1082-1083. | | Tsujimo Haruhiko: "Chugoku jōyōji-hyō: jitō jōyōji /490/, hojū jōyōji /500/," in Chūgokugo-gaku jiten, pp. 1083-1084. |
| 6. Systems of Transcription. | Hugh M. Stimson: The Jongyuan in yunn (New Haven, 1966), pp. 10-18 (tables). | | Tsujimoto Haruhiko and Hashimoto Mantaro: "Kakushu ompyōmonji oyobi Chūgokugo onsei tenshahō no taishōhyō," in Chūgokugo-gaku jiten, pp. 1087-1104. |

Such are the contents of the two levels; it remains to show how this information can be applied to present practice and with what results. No one would suggest that the features designated be used wholesale to achieve instant uniformity in Chinese language teaching. This would in any case be both impossible and ill-advised. Institutional and individual needs are too varied for one system to prevail, while many benefits flow from a variety of approaches. One might, however, reasonably suggest that the levels and repertoires of features detailed above be used as touchstones for the evaluation and improvement of existing programs. Already there is considerable overlap between the contents of Level A and Level B as indicated and the contents of individual language programs. The addition, from some generally accepted repertoire of features, of those items missing in individual programs, or their rearrangement within programs where they are already present, will bring each program more fully into consonance with the others and with the realities of the Chinese language.

A number of benefits are likely to flow from such a procedure. First, the content of any individual program becomes more comprehensive as it more nearly approaches generally accepted norms. Students are provided with a more adequate map of the linguistic territory which they are exploring. Second, texts and other teaching materials are improved as their contents are scrutinized against the external yardsticks of the selected levels and features. Third, by accommodating programs to a system of linguistic norms, the common ground between programs is widened, and programs are inherently improved without the disruption of existing academic sequences and without loss of special characteristics adapted to specific situations. Fourth, the relative standing of programs and students can be determined in an objective fashion, and a detailed profile of both easily prepared. The use of Level A and Level B criteria provide bases for comparison into which elementary, secondary, college, and graduate school courses of instruction can all be fitted. Fifth, and most pertinent to our topic, by adopting common goals we render the essential differences between our various programs minimal and by doing so solve to a large extent the problem of articulation by abolishing it. In addition, where the problem does arise, in an attentuated form, comparison of student and program profiles reveal in an objective, detailed, and

precise way the exact areas in which, and the degree to which, preparation does not meet expectation.

The number and content of the two levels outlined above is, of course, only tentative. It is to be hoped, however, that our Association will undertake further scrutiny of the problem and within a reasonable time arrive at definitive formulations. Given the present fast-growing and undisciplined state of Chinese studies in our country today, we can only expect more problems like the ones we have been discussing to arise, and it is up to our Association to see to it that this does not happen. The adoption of a set of commonly accepted levels and features of the sort discussed seems a reasonable first step and one calculated to secure to student and teacher alike the benefits both of healthy variety and necessary standardization.

## NOTES

1. Information communicated by Prof. John Tsu, Seton Hall University, at the annual meeting of the Chinese Language Teachers Association, New York, 29 December 1966. Addition of the 43 New York area schools which contribute students to the Columbia Carnegie High School Chinese Language Program raises the total to 177 schools.
2. Charles F. Hockett: A Course in Modern Linguistics (New York, 1960), p. 265.
3. For a detailed examination of the problem from the language teacher's standpoint, see unpubl. thesis (Georgetown University, 1965) by Chih-ping Chang, Auditory Testing and Prediction of Phonological Errors among American Students of Mandarin Chinese.
4. A comprehensive summary of Mandarin morphology is contained in Yuen Ren Chao, Mandarin Primer (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 39-44.
5. Hockett, p. 265.
6. For a survey of character frequency counts from 1860 through the present, see Albert Dien, Survey of Word Counts for Chinese (CU, Dept. of Chinese and Japanese: New York, 1966), dittographed.
7. For such a treatment, see R. Maeth: An Introduction to the Structure of the Chinese Writing System (CU, Dept. of Chinese and Japanese: New York, 1964).